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ABSTRACT

A language attitude survey was conducted in Toronto in the winter of 1978 in which 457 people of various ages, social classes, geographical backgrounds, and of both sexes were asked to listen to 20 voices representing five varieties of English and to rate them on a series of character traits and on a socio-economic status scale. The purpose was to establish the relative prestige of, and favorableness in attitudes towards five dialects of English: Canadian, Midwestern American, Southern, West Indian, and British, and to examine the effect of the listener variables: age, sex, social class, and region. Although previous language attitude studies, particularly those using the "matched guise" technique, have found that the variety of language used by a speaker has been a strong factor, the results of this study show that the dialect factor loses much of its strength when combined with real personality differences and passage content variation. In many parts of the analysis, the dialect factor, which was expected to be a significant source of variation, was no more significant than the speaker factor. The interaction of these two factors was usually the major source of variation. (Author/AMH)

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Attitudes Toward Five Dialects of English

- 1.1 The examination of stereotyped attitudes has been the subject of many sociolinguistic studies in the past twenty years. The literature contains studies of stereotyped attitudes towards many ethnic and social groups, using spoken language as the stimulus. The results of such studies show that the variety of language used by an individual affects judgements on his personality. Anisfeld, Bogot, and Lambert, (1962) Jewish accented versus non-accented English; Ryan and Caranza, (1975) Mexican American accented English versus non-accented English; Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum, (1960) Canadian French versus Canadian English.
- 1.2 Research has also been conducted (particularly in Britain) to look at attitudes towards regional varieties of English within the same country (see Giles and Powesland, Speech Style and Social Evaluation 1975). It seems that regional dialects in Britain can be ranked in some sort of order of prestige: the more a dialect differs from standard Received Pronunciation, the lower the prestige of the dialect (Giles 1972).

Tucker and Lambert (1969) found that both white and black listeners in the South preferred Midwestern American speech to Southern white speech. In a study by Markel, Eisler, and Reese (1967) Buffalo girls consistently downgraded New York speakers compared to Buffalo speakers. Both of these studies show a preference for one regional dialect over another regional dialect.

- 1.3 There seems to be only a few studies which have examined attitudes towards varieties of the same language spoken in different countries. Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum, in their study (1967) mentioned above, found less downgrading for speakers of Parisian French than for speakers of Canadian French. But Lambert, Giles, and Picard (1975) and Lambert, Giles, and Albert (1975) found that French speakers in Maine preferred the local upper class variety of French to Parisian French.
2. Language attitude studies have also found several listener characteristics which affect the listeners' judgements of the speaker's personality. These are: age (see Lambert Frankel, and Tucker 1965 and Francis Henry's study of racism in Toronto 1978); sex (see Preston 1963); social class (see Shuy, Baratz, and Wolfram 1969, and Lambert, Frankel, and Tucker 1965);

and geographical region (compare Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum 1960 and Lambert, Giles, and Pícard 1975, see Giles 1970, Ferguson 1960).

3.1 Given that, in all the studies mentioned, the variety of language used by a speaker seemed to cause the listeners to base their judgements on a stereotype image of people who use the same variety, another study was conducted to see how listeners would react to these five varieties of English: Canadian, Midwestern American, Southern American, West Indian, and British. It was difficult to predict what order of prestige would be found, if stereotyped attitudes were obtained. The most preferred variety would probably be either the Canadian, or the British variety but further hypothesizing would really be speculation, due to the variety and quantity of other factors involved. It was reasonable to assume that factors which were important in other studies would also be important here, such as the listener variable age, sex, social class, and region.

3.2 The usual method for eliciting reactions towards varieties of language is to ask a group of listeners to judge the personality of speakers of the varieties of language in question. Ideally, all personality and voice quality variables can be eliminated by using the matched guise technique, originally developed by Lambert et al. in 1960, in which one individual speaks in two or more varieties, leaving the variety of language used as the only possible source of variation.

4.0 Since it was impossible to use the matched guise technique in this study, there were four speakers from each of the five dialects, in order to minimize the effect of individual personality and voice quality differences. An average of the scores for the four speakers could be considered as an average rating for that dialect.

4.1 Speakers: All the speakers were male, between the ages of 20 and 35, and all had a university education. Thus they were similar in age, sex, and educational background.

4.2 Passage: Rather than having the speakers read a standard passage, as most other attitude studies have done, each speaker was asked to relate an experience in which he had been in danger of being killed. Labov (1965) in his study of the English spoken in New York City, found that most speakers used less formal speech as they became emotionally involved in their story. Informal speech was desirable in this study to maximize regional dialect differences.

4.3 Subjects: The subjects were 457 visitors to the Ontario Science Center in Toronto in the winter of 1978. The only limitation on the sample was that all subjects had to be native speakers of English. Otherwise, the sample contains members of all age groups, social classes, sexes, and several geographical regions. Tables I, II, III and IV show the number of subjects in each of these categories for each dialect group.

Table I

Dialect	Age groupings					
	12	13-15	16-19	20-29	30-39	40
British	13	20	15	22	11	12
Can.	13	21	12	21	6	12
Mid. Am.	14	11	12	28	15	15
Sth. Am.	12	10	9	37	16	9
W.I.	10	20	11	23	14	10
TOTAL	65	82	59	131	62	58

Table II

Dialect	Sex	
	M	F
British	44	52
Can.	42	43
Mid. Am.	46	49
Sth. Am.	51	42
W.I.	40	48
TOTALS	223	234

Table III

Dialect	Country			
	Can.	USA	Brit	Other
British	65	13	10	8
Can.	66	14	5	0
Mid. Am.	67	22	6	0
Sth. Am.	60	16	14	3
W.I.	55	20	11	2
TOTALS	313	85	46	13

Table IV

Dialect	Social Class		
	Low	Mid	High
British	40	25	32
Can.	36	35	17
Mid. Am.	32	43	18
Sth. Am.	24	36	32
W.I.	26	36	25
TOTALS	158	175	124

The subjects participated in small groups. Each group listened to only one voice, to eliminate the effect of hearing a sequence of voices. They were asked to listen to the voice and to record their judgements of the speaker's personality on a questionnaire which contained the following adjective pairs and questions:

smart
friendly
hardworking
kind
happy
sure of himself
goodlooking
pleasant
can be trusted
leader
polite

stupid
unfriendly
lazy
mean
sad
unsure of himself
ugly
unpleasant
cannot be trusted
follower
rude

Would you like to have this person for a friend?

very much

not at all

Would you like to work for this person?

very much

not at all

What kind of occupation might this person have?

Each item but the last question, which was open ended, had a 7 point scale. The listeners were also asked to supply some personal information so that the listener variables age, sex, social class, and region could be examined. 4.4 Analysis: The guessed occupation of the speakers and the occupations of the listeners were converted to a socio-economic status index using the Blishen scale, which assigns a rank to all the occupation titles in the Canadian census according to the education and income of people entering each occupational category. (Blishen 1967)

An analysis of variance was conducted on the average rating for each dialect on each character trait to see if the source of variation was the Dialect of the speaker or individual Speaker variables. Since no significant variation among the dialects was found on single character traits, the rest of the analysis used the total of the scores for the individual character items plus the first two questions, and the socio-economic status score from the Blishen scale.

5.0 Since there was apparently no stereotyping with the listeners considered all together, the effect of the listener variables age, sex, country and social class was then examined.

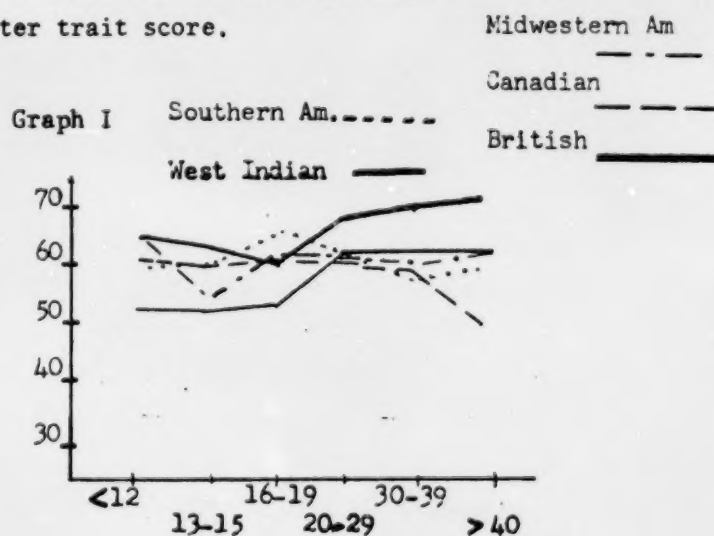
5.1 Age: The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable age for the character trait score.

Table V

Factor	F ratio
Age	.91
Dialect	4.3**
Speaker	3.9*
Dialect, Speaker	6.15**
Dialect, Age	1.1

* significant at the .05 level

** significant at the .01 level



The factor Age is not significant for the total average trait score. The factors Dialect and Speaker are significant at the .01 level and the .05 level respectively and the interaction of these two factors is significant at the .01 level.

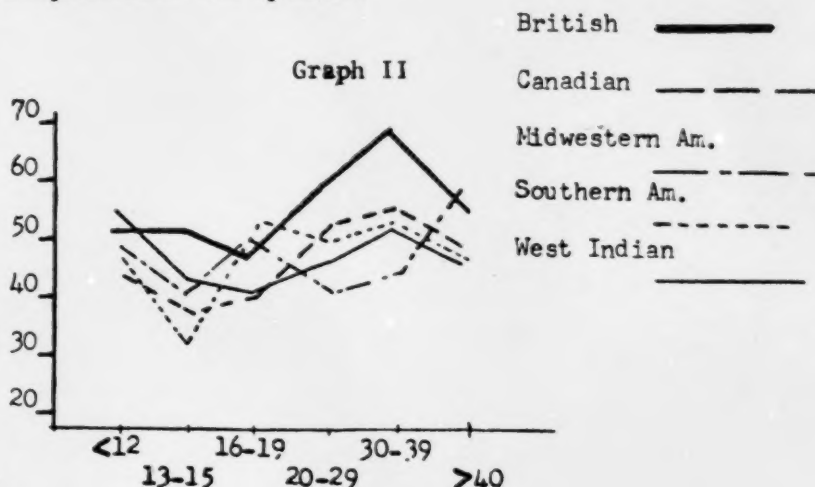
The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable age for the guessed occupation of the speaker.

Table VI

Factor	F ratio
Age	3.63**
Dialect	3.04*
Speaker	2.33
Dialect, Speaker	4.05**
Dialect, Age	1.16

*significant at the .05 level

** significant at the .01 level



For the guessed occupation of the speaker, Age is significant at the .01 level and both Dialect and the interaction of Dialect and Speaker are significant at the .05 level.

In the analysis of the listener variable Age, Dialect and Speaker factors are both significant for the character ratings, with Dialect more highly significant than Speaker. The only noticeable variations in the average character scores are the lowness of the West Indian score among the younger listeners and the height of the British score among the adults. Regarding the low West Indian score, one of the West Indian speakers related an experience involving a supernatural element. It is easy to understand that the topic in this particular case had a stronger effect than Dialect, especially for the younger listeners. However, a comparison of the individual speaker scores in the British variety group shows that no one speaker obtained unusual scores compared to the other speakers in this group. The fact that the British scores judged by the adults are higher than the other four varieties can be attributed to Dialect. This seems to be the only distinction made by the adults: they do not distinguish among the Canadian, Midwestern, Southern and West Indian varieties, but they do show a preference for the British one.

Age is a significant factor in judging the socio-economic status of the speaker. The older the listener, the higher the socio-economic status given to the speaker. Dialect is also significant, while the Speaker factor is not. The difference in judgements of the dialects within one age group can be attributed to the Dialect of the speaker.

As in the character ratings, the British variety received the highest status rating from the adults. The over 40 age group gave the British and Midwestern American dialects almost the same rating although the American score is slightly higher.

5.2 Sex: The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable sex for the character trait score.

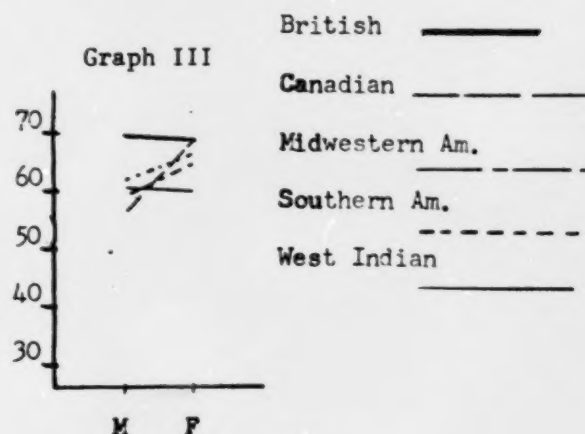
Table VII

Factor	F ratio
Sex	13.2**
Dialect	6.6**
Speaker	6.8**
Dialect, Speaker	5.5**
Dialect, Sex	4.1*

* significant at the .05 level

**significant at the .01 level

Graph III



The sex of the listener is significant at the .01 level in the overall character ratings. Dialect, Speaker, and the interaction of these two factors are also significant at the .01 level. The interaction of Dialect and Sex is significant at the .05 level; this is the only case where the interaction of Dialect and the listener variable is statistically significant.

The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable sex for the guessed occupation of the speaker.

Table VIII

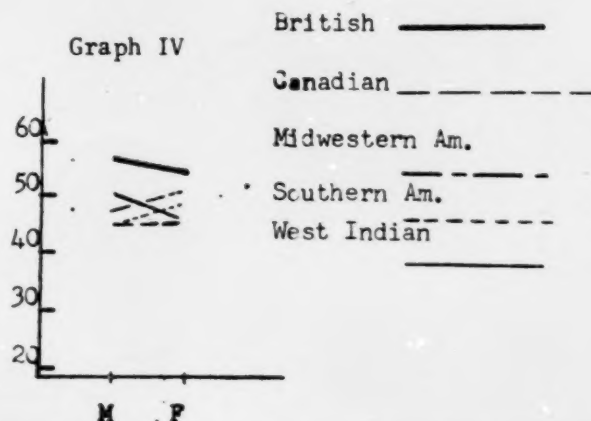
Factor	F ratio
Sex	.06
Dialect	6.3**
Speaker	5.7*
Dialect, Speaker	5.3**

Dialect, Sex 1.1

* significant at the .05 level

**significant at the .01 level

Graph IV



Males show a definite preference for the British variety in the character ratings whereas females judge all varieties approximately the same. Females give generally higher judgements of all voices than do the males. A more extensive study should include both male and female speakers as well as male and female listeners to see if the relevant factor is the male preference for the British variety or the female tendency to judge all male voices higher than they might judge female voices.

Male and female listeners do not differ in their socio-economic status judgements. They both give a high status to the British variety compared to the other four varieties. Although females do not judge speakers of a British variety higher on personality traits, they do indicate that this variety has a higher status.

5.3 Country: The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable country for the character trait score.

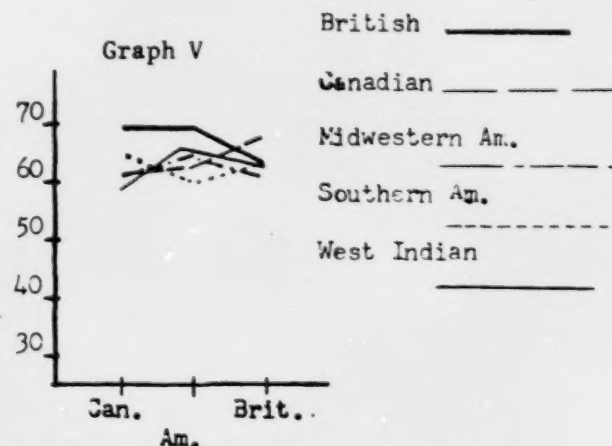
Table IX

Factor	F ratio
Country	.19
Dialect	.84
Speaker	1.8
Dialect, Speaker	3.92**
Dialect, Country	.48

* significant at the .05 level

**significant at the .01 level

Graph V



The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable country for the guessed occupation of the speaker.

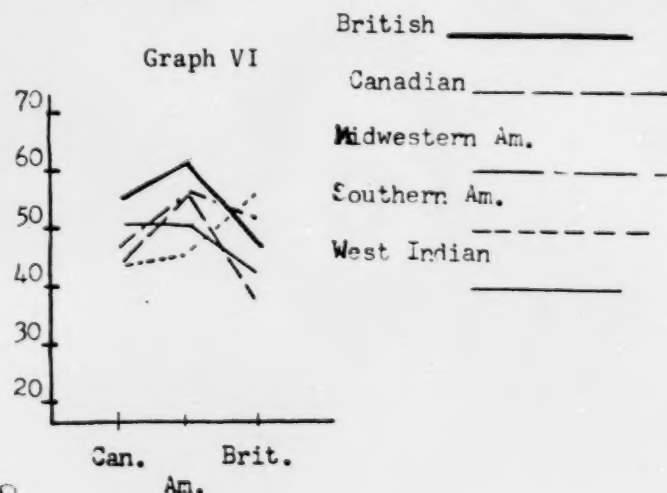
Table X

Factor	F ratio
Country	3.20
Dialect	2.00
Speaker	3.34*
Dialect, Speaker	2.52*
Dialect, Country	2.09

*significant at the .05 level

**significant at the .01 level

Graph VI



Enough subjects from Canada, the United States, and Britain participated in the survey to use these three regions for analysis. Only thirteen subjects came from somewhere other than these three countries so they were not included in the analysis.

The country of the listener is not significant for either the character ratings or the socio-economic status scores. The only source of variation in the character ratings is the interaction of Dialect and Speaker so that the variation cannot be attributed to one particular factor. Even though the British score is the highest for both Canadian and American listeners, we cannot conclude that these two groups have British speech as their model.

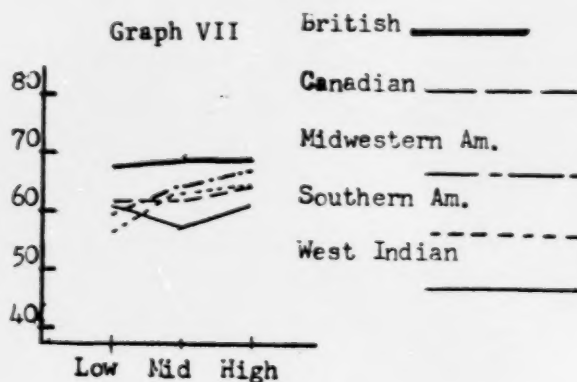
Although Dialect is not a significant factor for the socio-economic status analysis, the Canadians and Americans both assign a higher status to the British speakers. Little else can be said due to the insignificance of Dialect and Country.

5.4 Social Class: Subjects whose socio-economic status index was less than 39.99 or over 59.99 on the Blischen scale were considered to be members of the lower and upper classes respectively, while those in between were designated as middle class.

The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable social class for the character trait score.

Table XI

Factor	F ratio	
Soc-eco status	2.39	
Dialect	3.60*	
Speaker	6.35**	* significant at the .05 level
Dialect, Speaker	3.35**	**significant at the .01 level
Dialect, Soc-eco	.63	



The table and graph below show the results of the analysis of the listener variable social class for the guessed occupation of the speaker.

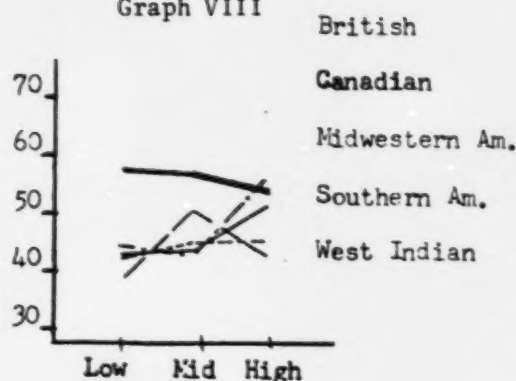
Table XII

Factor	F ratio
Soc-eco status	.95
Dialect	2.3
Speaker	1.26
Dialect, Speaker	1.61
Dialect, Soc-eco	.54

* significant at the .05 level

**significant at the .01 level

Graph VIII



Although Speaker variation is more highly significant than variation due to Dialect, it is interesting that the British variety obtained the highest average character score from all social classes. The British score is almost the same for each social class whereas the other four varieties received slightly higher scores from middle and upper class listeners than they did from the lower class listeners. This indicates that the lower class listeners made more of a distinction between the British variety and the other four dialects than did the middle and upper class listeners.

The fact that no factor shows statistical significance in the analysis of socio-economic status of the speaker by the socio-economic status of the listeners makes it difficult to draw any definite conclusions. However, the lower class tendency to upgrade the British variety is shown also in socio-economic status ratings. The middle and upper class listeners make less of a distinction between the British score and the other scores.

6. Conclusions: Stereotyped attitudes towards these five varieties of English were not obtained. Age and sex were the only significant listener variables: age for socio-economic status judgements and sex for character ratings. In all but one case (socio-economic status of the speaker by age of the listener) where Dialect was a significant factor, Speaker was also found to be significant so that not all variation among the scores obtained by each variety can be attributed to either Dialect or Speaker.

A consistent, if non-significant finding is the fact that the British variety received the highest score from almost every group of listeners. While the average scores for the other varieties were either similar to each other or showed a lot of variation, the British score usually was higher than the other four scores. This indicates a general preference for the British speakers. It is impossible to make any conclusions about the relative

prestige of the other four varieties. There does not seem to be any sort of hierarchy of prestige as hypothesized.

The finding that Dialect was not statistically significant compared to Speaker is in itself significant. There is at least as much, if not more, variation within each dialect group as among dialects. The strong effect of Dialect of the speaker on listener judgements of his personality found previously is considerably weaker when other real personality and topic variables are present. Generally, there is more variation among speakers of one dialect than among dialects. In spite of the attempts to minimize Speaker variables, real personality and voice quality differences are impossible to eliminate unless the same voice is used to represent all varieties, as in the 'matched guise' technique. In at least one case, we saw that the actual content of the spoken passage caused one speaker to obtain a rating which was considerably lower than the other three for his dialect group.

When real personality differences and variation in the content of the passage are included with the variable Dialect, Dialect becomes only one of several factors which affect listener judgements of the speaker's personality. As we have seen, for the five varieties of English examined here, real personality and passage content are stronger factors than Dialect.

Future research should concentrate on establishing the effect of all personality and voice quality factors, and particularly the effect of the actual content of the passage, so that a more realistic account of the role of the variety of language used can be developed.

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